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ABSTRACT

The basic language issues in Canada are two-fold: (1) French-Canadians are making serious attempts to maintain their native language and culture, and a move towards French unilingualism is apparent; (2) English-Canadians are showing increasing interest in becoming bilingual, mainly because they are not threatened by native language loss or by cultural assimilation; and they are gradually accepting the economic and educational advantages of learning French. Some of the bilingual programs developed for English-speaking students are discussed. Evaluations of these programs have attempted to answer questions concerning the effect of bilingual education on French and English proficiency, the students. knowledge of curriculum subjects other than language, and IQ and cognitive development. Results indicate that bilingual programs do not affect cognitive development or achievement in curriculum subjects. Although children in total immersion programs do lag behind in English skills, they catch up when English Language Arts instruction is begun. Secondary students' English skills are not affected, and both primary and secondary students have French skills superior to students in regular language classes. Better results are obtained in reading skills by introducing reading first in French in the immersion programs. In addition, one study has noted that students in immersion programs may develop and reinforce their own classroom dialect of French. (CLK)

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Some Issues in Bilingual Education in Canada

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Some Issues in Bilingual Education in Canada

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Canada is a country with two official languages - English and French. This does not mean that each individual within the country is a speaker of both languages. In fact the realization of a goal of individual bilingualism would, in all likelihood, lead to the eventual disappearance of one of the languages, or to the development of a diglossic situation.

The issue, however, is not one of making all Canadians bilingual but of a) ensuring that the language and cultural traditions of both official language groups are protected and maintained and b) encouraging bilingualism so that effective communication between the French and English groups can occur. Achieving these goals does not imply that similar educational strategies be employed by French-Canadians and English-Canadians alike.

The dominance and importance of the English language in North America ensures it's maintenance. English-Canadians who set out to learn French - or who insist that their children learn French - do so because they perceive particular economic, educational and/or cultural advantages in so doing. Generally speaking, the learning of French as a second language does not pose a threat of native language loss to English-Canadians as a group.

The learning of English as a second language by French-Canadians however, does pose a threat of native language loss. For generations, French-Canadians have been concerned about the maintenance of their language and cultural traditions. In recent years, their concerns have become increasingly justified by such trends as (1) the declining French-Canadian birthrate, (2) the use of English as the language of business and industry concurrent with Quebec becoming steadily more industrialized and urbanized, and (3) the increasing enrollment of French-Canadian children, and the enrollment of approximately 95% of the non-French immigrant children, into English-language schools. The situation has become serious enough that pressure groups are urging the Quebec provincial government to reconsider its present legislation such that it will not only preserve but strengthen the French language in

I wish to thank Guy Dumas for helping me to understand the French-Canadian perspective.

Quebec. The final content of the legislation has yet to be determined but in all likelihood, it will concentrate on promoting French in schools, and as the language of work. Promoting French in schools; for example, requiring that all French-Canadian and immigrant children attend French schools, may preserve and strengthen the position of the French language, but it will also restrict the educational (although not other) opportunities that have been available in the past for French-Canadians to become bilingual.

To put it another way, the language issues in Canada are two-fold:

1) The French-Canadians are making serious attempts to maintain their native language and culture. For the present, this appears to imply a concomitant move towards French unilingualism.

2) The English-Canadians, threatened neither by native language loss nor cultural assimilation, and gradually accepting possible economic and educational advantages to the learning of French, are manifesting an increased interest in acquiring bilingual skills.

What does all this mean for the future of bilingual education in Canada? Before continuing, let me define bilingual education as we use the term in our work. Bilingual education is defined as "schooling provided fully or partly through the medium of a second language with the object of making children proficient in the second language while at the same time maintaining and developing their mother tongue and fully guaranteeing their general educational development" (Stern, 1972). This definition excludes prolonged and intensive instruction of a second language as such. Its essential component is that the second language is used as a medium of instruction and communication. The underlying assumption is that in order to teach a language, there must be an opportunity for students to use the language. In other words, the language must be seen as a means to an end rather than as an end in itself. The language must be used as a tool for communicating.

Programs which fit into this definition are - for the reasons outlined above - increasing in number in English-speaking communities. The emphasis in French-speaking communities in Canada - whether they are in a minority as in most Canadian provinces, or in a majority position as in Quebec - is on the teaching of native language skills in order to maintain and strengthen the French language and culture. English, because of its

preponderance outside of the school either is not taught in the school or is taught as a subject. On the other hand, certain sectors of the English-Canadian population faced with the fact that English is the language heard outside of the school, and recognizing that there are certain advantages to being bilingual and that traditional methods of teaching French as a second language in the school have rarely produced bilingual individuals, are insisting on some form of bilingual education for their children.

Although several bilingual education programs for French-speaking students exist in Canada, none of them have, to my knowledge, been subjected to a rigorous evaluation. On the other hand, a number of bilingual education programs for English-speaking students have recently been established in Canada on an experimental basis, and are being evaluated by researchers exterior to the particular school board. For this reason, I wish to spend the remaining time describing these programs, the research questions asked, and the results found.

Bilingual education programs for English-speaking children are currently in operation in a number of cities across Canada. They are all optional programs, that is, the decision to enter the program rests with the parents and child. For the most part, children in the programs are from middle class families. Although the programs have many aspects in common, a number of differences are also apparent. The differences include such factors as the grade level at which the program begins, the stage in the program when instruction in English Language Arts is introduced, and the total amount of time allotted for instruction in the French language. For example, kindergarten classes for English-speaking children in which French is the only language used by the teacher (French immersion classes) exist in at least eight cities across Canada. The children in some of these classes will be introduced to daily periods of an English Language Arts program in grade one, others not until grade two or three, and still others not until grade four. In other cities, either by choice or because there is no kindergarten program, "French immersion" classes begin at the grade one level and are followed by another year or two of French immersion before English Language Arts is introduced. Another bilingual program which begins at the grade one level provides instruction in French in the morning and in English in the afternoon through to the end of grade four. And finally, there are other bilingual programs which do not begin until the grade 7 or

8 level, at which time students receive most of their instruction in French for a year followed up by the opportunity of taking approximately 40% of their curriculum in French.

Many of these programs have been evaluated (see for example, Lambert & Tucker, 1972; Edwards & Casserly, 1971; 1972; 1973; Barik & Swain, 1972; Barik, McTavish & Swain, 1973; Swain, Barik & Nwanunobi, 1973; Barik & Swain, 1974; Barik, Swain & McTavish, 1974.) Each program evaluation has examined at least four basic questions, namely;

1) Are the children enrolled in the bilingual education program more proficient in French than they would be if they received daily periods of French as a second language instruction?

2) Does prolonged exposure to a second language result in some loss of facility in the students' native language?

3) Does instruction in a second language of subject content, for example mathematics, affect the students' achievement in that subject?

4) Does the learning of a second language affect the child's IQ and general cognitive development?

Answers to these questions have been sought by administering tests of French listening and speaking skills, English language skills, subject area knowledge, and IQ to the students in an experimental bilingual education program and to a comparison group of students enrolled in the regular English program.

Because several of the evaluations undertaken have used the same measuring instruments to answer some of the above questions, further comparisons across programs can be made which provide at least tentative answers to the following questions:

1) Are the English language skills of students in a partial French immersion class (1/2 day French, 1/2 day English) superior to those of students in a total French immersion class?

2) What are the consequences of introducing English reading and writing prior to, concurrently with, or subsequent to the introduction of French reading and writing in the primary French immersion classes?

3) Are the French language skills of students in a total French immersion class superior to those of students in a partial French immersion class?

It would be impossible to present the results of these studies in the detailed manner they deserve given the time allotment. For the time being, I will attempt to summarize the findings, and hope that you will refer to the research reports for further details. The results are as follows:

1. Students who have attended several years of a bilingual education program do not show signs of cognitive retardation. They, in fact, continue to perform as well on standardized IQ tests as their English-educated counterparts.

2. Where achievement in subject areas taught in French has been tested in English, students perform as well as their English-instructed peers.

3. Prior to the introduction of formal training in the English Language Arts, children in the primary total French immersion program do not perform as well as their English-educated peers in English reading skills. However, they quickly catch up to their comparison group in English reading skills if they are introduced to formal instruction in English Language Arts at the grade two, three or four levels.

4. Students in a secondary level French immersion program who concurrently take a course in English do not fall behind in their English reading and vocabulary knowledge.

5. Primary and secondary level French immersion programs lead to the development of French skills which are superior to those of students following a course of French as a second language.

6. Primary partial French immersion programs appear to have no advantages over primary total French immersion programs. They do not guarantee that students will keep up with their peers in the regular English program on English skills, nor with their peers in the total French immersion program on French skills. However they do result in the development of French comprehension skills equivalent to students exposed to similar amounts of instruction time in French.

7. The introduction of reading skills in French in primary French immersion programs prior to the introduction of reading skills in English appears to foster more rapid transfer of reading skills than vice versa. The teaching of English reading followed by the introduction of French reading appears to have negative effects on reading in both French and English.

8. Students in the French immersion programs may be developing and reinforcing their own classroom dialect of French. This point needs some qualification as it has only been noted by one team of researchers (Dumas, Selinker and Swain, 1973) studying the French spoken by children at the end of their second year in a primary French immersion program.

In French immersion programs, emphasis is on communication. Students are encouraged to express their thoughts and ideas in French, in many cases before they have acquired the grammatical means for expressing them. For example, students may wish to talk about past or future events before they know how to form the past or future tenses. Thus sentences like "Hier je mange un biscuit" are heard. In situations like this, the students find a means of communicating. They may, as in the example given, express the meaning intended through the use of appropriate vocabulary rather than through grammatical modification. Or they may make use of what they know already, that is, their own native language. Thus we hear sentences like "Il veut moi de dire français à lui" for "He wants me to speak French to him", "Le sac a un trou dans le" for" The bag has a hole in it", and "C'est un parc qu'on va aller à" for "It's a park that we're gonna go to."

Some of the errors disappear as the children learn the correct means of expression. But what we are finding is that some of the errors do not disappear. Why? My hunch is that they do not disappear because of a combination of two factors. First, the teacher tends to ignore these errors because the student has in fact communicated what he wanted to say and it would interrupt the flow of dialogue and instruction about a topic to continually correct the students' errors. Secondly, other students in the class use the same forms. Their speech is heard by other students which serves to reinforce the language patterns used. The result, then, is that students develop and reinforce their own classroom dialect of French.

These are the questions and answers that have been found by researchers evaluating bilingual education programs for English-speaking students. These and other questions are equally as relevant to ask about bilingual education programs for French-Canadian students in various sociolinguistic settings. There is no reason to assume the results would be the same, but until we know, little can be said about the positive or negative effects of bilingual education for French-speaking children.

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